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Post shuttle story explanation 'tripe'

If Ben Bradlee were Pinocchio, his nose would be the size of the Washington Monument.

Defending The Washington Post's front page story about the upcoming launch of a military intelligence satellite — a story Defense Secretary Weinberger says causes "actual damage to the nation's security" and may give "aid and comfort to the enemy" — Executive Editor Bradlee says: "The information in there is absolutely simple information. Very little different from what CBS said the night before." He says "virtually every fact" in this story "is a matter of public record."

What a crock! What a lie! What arrogance! Why is Mr. Bradlee attempting to peddle this kind of tripe which can so easily be demonstrated to be false? A CBS spokesman says the only reference CBS News made regarding this subject was an allusion to "a new generation of intelligence satellite." Period. Conversely, the Post story revealed what is said to be the launch date of the satellite, its function, its cost, that it is to be in "geosynchronous orbit 22,500 miles above" the western part of the Soviet Union and, according to "one source," that it "requires an inertial upper stage engine."

This is "simple information?" And if the Post story — which Senate Intelligence Committee member Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) says is, if true, "extraordinarily damaging" to the United States — is from information mostly already on the public record, then why did the Post put it on the front page? A Post editorial calls the Post story "newsworthy." But the Post can't have it both ways. Which is it, gang? Old news or new news?

In his commentary on ABC's World News Tonight, Post/Newsweek lapdog George Will said the Post story is *not* the kind of "journalistic extremism" of the 1970s which said government is an evil adversary. publish-and-be-damned, there's an absolute public right to know everything and we have no duty to consider the consequences of our actions. No siree. Mr. Will says the Post held back information which, in the Post's judgment, would not be in the national interest to disclose.

When asked what he thinks has led to this change in attitude from the 1970s, Mr. Will said (are you seated?) that "it's just a general reasonableness has come over the press," and the Post, among others, has accepted the premise that "journalists are citizens also."

But this is sheer sophistry. Mr. Will has thrashed a straw man. The categorical view he attributes to journalistic extremists in the 1970s simply did not exist, not in the black-and-white way he states it. Furthermore, Mr. Will begs the key threshold question raised by Pentagon spokesman Michael Burch, which is, basically: Who the hell is the Post to decide what is in the national interest? Says Mr. Burch:

"It's not up to the editor of The Washington Post to determine national security. That is done by a certain set of laws. The secretary of defense has responsibility for determining what's in the interests of the national security."

Another idiot commenting on the Post story is Bill Moyers. On the CBS Evening News, noting and then proving that he didn't see "what the flap is all about," Mr. Bill said even Defense Department officials admit that little information about military cargo and space shuttles could be kept from the Russians "if secrecy was imposed." Terrific! So why not reveal everything to the Soviets? What an absurd point.

In a pathetic attempt at humor, Mr. Bill says Soviet spy trawlers off the Florida coast don't think the space shuttle is a new ride at Disney World. And Soviet sensors in space which relay data to the Kremlin don't subscribe to the Post or watch evening news shows. Ha, ha. What a jerk. But Soviet spies on the ground in this country do, Mr. Bill.

Mr. Bill says the Soviets know what floats above Moscow, and we know what they put in our skies, and this is good because there is "less chance for miscalculation the more each side knows about the other." Talk about Disney World! See where Mr. Bill comes from? In his view, the Soviet Union and the United States each pose an equal danger to the other. What garbage.

And finally, Mr. Bill says that, "unless there's a war going on," journalists can't be blamed for raising an eyebrow "when suddenly the Pentagon shouts national security, national security!"

Unless there's a war going on? Where do you live, Mr. Bill, on the moon? Since communism seized power in the Soviet Union there has been a war going on, a war for the world! Wake up, Mr. Bill! Wake up!

In its editorial, the Post says that, when someone in our government says material it might publish would adversely affect the national security, "we take the admonition seriously." Sure. Which is why you published this story without checking with our government, right? It's enough to make you throw up.